CONTOUR FARMING

PRACTICE INTRODUCTION

USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service - practice code 330

CONTOUR FARMING

Contour farming is performed on sloping cropland by following the natural contours when tilling the soil, planting, and cultivating. It also includes following established grades of terraces
or diversions.

PRACTICE INFORMATION

Contour farming is a very cost effective practice when properly planned and applied.

The purpose of this practice is to reduce erosion, control runoff water, and increase moisture infiltration. Contour farming generally applies to sloping cropland but may be applicable on recreation and wildlife areas where cultural practices such as tillage and planting are used for production of special purpose crops.

Properly designed couture farming will utilize tillage marks and furrows to slow runoff and allow more moisture to infiltrate. Contour farming can increase erosion if rainfall amount exceeds the ability of the contours to remove the runoff. Therefore, this practice is usually planned in conjunction with other practices needed for support in the event runoff exceeds the carrying capacity of the contours.

To be effective, the contours need to meet certain design criteria. Local standards and specifications generally cover the following items:

1. Alignment requirements when planned and applied with practices such as terraces, diversions, and contour strips.
2. Alignment requirements when contour farming is applied without protection from supporting practices. (see above)
3. Established tolerances for deviation from true contour, row grade and row length.